

REMINISCENCES FROM THE LIFE OF ATHANASIUS KARLIN: THE SETTLEMENT

The origin of the settlement.

"In the early part of March 1876 the greater number of us, that is, all over 21 years of age, moved out in order to build their homes. The office for the country was at those times still in Hays. Upon payment of 14 dollars they received 80 acres land. And since the Herzoger were of greater number than us, they took their land always nearer to the railroad, but we didn't want to be together with them, we had to take the tracts further away from the railroad. The section Schuland Nr. 16, where now the village is, was decided upon where the buildings should be erected. The eastern half of section 10, where Peter is living now, we bought for dollar 2 per acre, so we paid dollar 640 for 320 acres.

"During the three months we stayed in Topeka, it became known that we shall remain in Kansas and intended to buy horses and cows. From all sides of the country there were horses for sale. At first old and crippled ones, but as we didn't buy them, the Americans said, "See the Russians, they understand something about horses," and brought better, even very good ones to the market. The horses we bought were not expensive. The brown Wallag, 6 years old cost 80 dollars. We called it "den alten Braunen". It would be worth now 160 dollars.

"Then we bought one Wallag 4 years old, 60 D., one brown which would cost here 175 D. we got for 60 D.; 2 Fuchs-Wallagen for 115 Ds. would be now 250 Ds. worth; that is together 5 horses and then 2 milk-cows for 55 Ds.; the two foxes and cows were bought from a Mr. Schooner, a cow for 30 Ds. from Federling, the man for whom I had worked for two months. The Oxen. It was Gevater Michael's fault that we bought them. He said, they have had Oxen in Russia and more work is gotten out of them than of horses, especially with the Brechpflug to break up meadows. So, we bought two oxen with yoke and chain for 70 Ds.; but two Oxen were not enough for

such a kind of plow and we had to buy two more at Hays. They cost together with yoke and chain and such an old wagon 85 Ds. If we had bought instead of the four oxen, three horses, we could have cultivated twice as much grounds as we did in the first Spring. A set of harness cost 24 Ds. Those American were just too expensive and more over not good enough and we made two other sets of harness, the Russian way. They were good enough for the plows, but they could not be used for the wagons. We bought the wagons and plows in Kansas City, a Studebaker Wagon, 75 Ds., two Brake-plows 18 Ds. a piece. A carload of timber had to be bought too, for three houses, ours, Bissings and Koerners. The price was 15 Ds. per 1000 for the coarse wood and Ds. 20 for floorings and ceilings. Since we got free transportations from the R.R. Co. for one year did we buy enough flour for two years, as we could not expect any harvest the first year. The price for flour should have been Ds. 2.50 a hundred lb, but got it for Ds. 1.25 and we bought 5000 lbs. Having done enough buying, we had to pack it and load the freight car and then, the train went on, bringing us nearer and nearer to our goal."

Hays City

"Upon our arrival at Hays on March 1, 1876, we rented an old empty store from Henry and Fred Kruger. The store was on the corner, where there is now the Lutheran church. The rent was 15 Ds. a month. To that place we moved, three families: ours, the Bissings and Koerners. The horses and cattle we put into the stockyard. The fodder, a heap of Millet straw, we bought from John Buford, a German. He was butcher in Hays, we paid him Ds. 15 a ton. The first Germans we made acquaintance with were Charlie Muller and Wm. King. They help us much in many ways and we remained friends till they died.

"The Sunday, March 3, started with rain and lightning and thunder, followed by a snowstorm as only March can bring. Then, we didn't feel warm in the old drafty store. On Monday, the 4th arrived the carload with timber and farm-implements from Kansas City. It had to be unloaded and brought out to the country on the bad

roads. Fortunately, there was everything prairie. Having finally the goods at its destination, we needed someone to guard it, but where to live? Prairie all around. So we dug out a ditch in the ground 6 by 6 feet? It should also serve as cellar. It was covered with sticks and branches and some soil and there the watchmen had to spend the nights. The others left in the evening for Hays and returned in the morning to work on their future homes.

"One morning, there was such a snowstorm, that our men could not come from Hays. Michael Mayer, Johann Koerner and I had stayed that night in the dugout. In the morning, when we stuck out our heads from the hole and saw the snowstorm, we went back without having been able to make the breakfast. It wasn't long, there came old Van der Dunk, a Belgian who could not speak much German. He too worked on a home for himself half a mile south behind the Steinberg. Now, he wanted to go into our dugout, he being a big heavy man made it very close in our hole down there. So we were lying there covered together and sleeping most of the time till evening, when old Vanderdunk stirred saying: "Junkes ik wes niks ick eb e ben hier, wen es is nems dok wek" (boys, is something lying on me, if it is, so take it away). His legs had gone asleep on him and now he thought somebody had his legs upon him. When we looked out of our hole we found it still snowing. We were afraid if it would keep up for the whole night, we might be snowed in the next morning. Therefore, we decided to go over to our neighbor, the Masts, who lived in a small shelter, where now Ambrose Staabs are living.

"After our supper, consisting of bread and some cold meat we went over and wanted old Vanderdunk to come along, but he didn't want to. He went out into the storm towards Victoria. Our neighbor, though he wasn't worth much and his wife still less, took us in quite friendly but that little thing which should be called a house was so crowded with drivers who had to take firing wood from Paradise Creek to Fort Hays. They were returning from Hays and had entered that house because it was on their way home. They had whiskey

with them and were drinking the whole night yowling (which should be singing) and we were afraid of them. Finally they asked us if we could sing too. We shook our heads and said, no, no. They did not leave us in peace wanting us to drink and to sing, sing. So much we understood and some of them got wild and threatened us if we wouldn't sing. So we had to. I took tenor, Michael alto and Wanne the bass. They must have liked our singing, for as soon as we had finished a song they holloed for another one, again and again, sing, sing. We sang out of fear all night through till we got blue. At last a new day broke on. How happy we were to get away from there.

"It was a bright, nice morning and our people came from Hays and brought us something to eat. And then the work on our homes was taken up again."

How Catharinenstadt was being built.

"At first three lots were measured out for the building of the homes, each family getting a lot of 140 by 20 feet. The excavation could be started. Each house was planned 28 feet long and 18 feet wide, the inside walls 6 feet high and two half-windows into each wall and one front door. The ground was excavated 3 feet and three feet of sod were put up around, thus we formed our six feet high walls. The roof got covered with boards and sod on the top. We worked together, i.e., us, the Bissing and Koerner boys, the old Gustel Vetter (cousin) Bissing made all the doors and window frames. Finally we got finished and one hut (Simolinka) looked like the other. Down in the Creek we dug the community well and now there was Catharinenstadt created, the first accomplishment in North America, Ellis County, Kansas. We had lived in Hays in the old store for a month and seven days.

"On April 8, 1876 we moved to our new homesteads. What a happiness, most happy was the women folk, now they had a place where they could be at home at last. They were more pleased with their own huts than with the nicest rented house in Topeka. But the walls inside were still all black, that did not seem to them too nice. So they quickly began the plastering with clay and then they got Lebaster (like plaster of Paris) and

whitewashed with it the walls. That looked beautiful. But Oh dear, after the first bad rainfall, the water came through the roof and washed the whiteness all away. They had to whitewash again and that after every heavy raining.

"It was Palm Sunday on the fourth of April and we held our first devotions at Bissings Simolinka, singing, reciting of the rosary and other prayers; we did that every Sunday.